

# Is it Not Now? : School Counselors' Training in Tanzania Secondary Schools

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## Abstract

Counseling is currently becoming a necessary service for school learners in the developing world, this is due to fact that, the challenges facing learners in their learning process results into both internalizing and externalizing problems which affect student's learning in terms of social, psychology and academic. This paper explores the status of school counselor's training, knowledge and skills in Tanzania secondary schools. It attempt to assess school counselor's perception towards the existing school counseling services and the degree of readiness to attend a counseling training in order to improve their counseling skills. The sample for the study included 62 school counselors from 16 secondary schools in Dar es salaam and the data were collected through questionnaires and interviews. The findings indicate that, there is less training among school counselors in the studied secondary schools. It was also noted that, though some school counselors attended some trainings, their knowledge, skills and awareness to school counseling principles is very limited. However, school counselors' perception towards counseling services in schools is good and their degree of readiness to attend counseling training is positive ( $M=1.39$ ,  $SD= 0.554$ ). It was therefore concluded that school counseling services need to be enhanced through provision of school counseling trainings to teachers who are appointed to serve as school counselors in various secondary schools. With the support from these findings, it is recommended that, seminars and workshops for raising awareness as well as long term trainings are important in order to make school counseling services effective. Therefore, future research can also observe the extent to which the counseling component is taught in teacher colleges and universities so as to test the rationale for appointing teachers to work as school counselors even without any specified training on counseling.

**Key words:** School counselor, Training, Perception, Knowledge

## INTRODUCTION

School counseling education programs can provide intense and appropriate preparation for school counselors to actively engage and tackle issues disrupting the learning process of students, especially those from low-income backgrounds and from the marginalized communities. With the support of local school districts and communities, counselor educators can give school counselors the confidence and preparation so that they can make a significant contribution to schools through provision of counseling services to school children who are currently facing different challenges in their environment (Rudd & Steen, 2009). Supporting this idea, Martin (2002) contended that changes focusing on improving school counseling services are not optional in this rapidly changing society and school learning, this is due to competition among children for the limited resources and services in schools. For the successive provision of counseling services in any school setting, different requirements are required to be met such conditions can include trained school counselor, counseling facilities, guidance and counseling guideline as well as infrastructures (Kidd, 2006).

Therefore, this paper seek to examine the status for school counselors' training in Tanzania secondary schools, the level of knowledge and their counseling skills as well as the perception they have towards the importance of counseling training for teachers in schools. It assesses their degree of readiness to attend a course in counseling if required for the purpose of helping students in managing the pressure from different areas of the school system.

## Background

Basically guidance and counseling in schools is primarily concerned with individual behavioral processes. This means that counselors need to have intensive training so as to deals with the personal world of students and help them understand themselves in relation with their internal world. It is further emphasized that guidance and counseling is based on the recognition of the dignity and worth of the individual client and right to choose what s good for him/her. Hence it is the responsibility of the school counselors to establish environment where their students can attend for counseling voluntarily and seek help willingly (Mutie & Ndambuki, 1999).

Counseling can be seen as the vehicle of development, change and life enhancement in individuals' life. Therefore, in counseling process, a skillful counselor can help clients who want to develop themselves and make changes in their lives. For an effective counseling process, a skillful counselor should have some professional skills such as relationship, helping counseling, case conceptualization, diagnosis, strategies, and interventions. These skills are described as competencies ranging from the basic and simple level to the more advanced and complex (Whiston, 2002). Therefore counseling relationship should be formed upon trust and caring so as to make sure that the service form integral part of each student's study path.

School counselors need to be aware of the demographics of the changing student populations and resources in order to provide multicultural guidance and obtain needed skills. Counselors need professional preparations in order to provide services for changing culturally diverse populations. In line to that, Nyamwange and Odima (2012) found out that almost 60% of teacher counselors in Nyamira-Kenya are untrained in guidance and counseling.

The study findings also conforms with Ngumi's (2003) views who argues that even the untrained teachers do not cover sufficient courses in guidance and counseling to enable them effectively render the guidance and counseling services. It is further recommended that seminars and workshops need to be offered as a continuing education in guidance and counseling as this will help equipping teacher-counselors with latest theories and techniques of counseling to make them effective counselors. In this aspect, there is a genuine need for trained personnel in guidance and counseling arena as this will help to produce effective guidance and counseling services in schools and make student's learning effective and efficient.

### **The Demand for Skilled Counselors and Effective Guidance and Counseling in Schools**

Since school counseling is unique and multifaceted roles across different specialization, the process of training school counselors gain serious importance. This is because school professional counseling includes the application of mental health, psychological, or human development principles through cognitive, effective, behavioral or systematic intervention strategies that address wellness, personal growth, or career development as well as pathology (ACA, 1997). Therefore a core counseling perspective may be thought of as containing five foundational areas including professional counseling knowledge, skills, ethics, values, and worldwide view which are also critical to school counselors.

In fact, accredited counselor education programs must include different key features which are professional orientation, ethical practice, social and cultural diversity, human growth and development, career development, helping relationship, group work, assessment, and research and program evaluation (CACREP, 2009). These guidelines are intended to ensure that counseling professional especially those in schools gain knowledge of human development, behavioral, group dynamics, relationship, culture, health and wellness, and illness and psychopathology. At the same time, this knowledge also enhances a professional ability to understand the complexities clients or students bring to counseling as well as the full range of possible ways to address their needs. In general, each counseling specialization encompasses additional specific knowledge and competences to address the specific areas of expertise required (CORE, 2007; CACREP, 2009). This calls for the need to train school counselors so as to make them effective in provision of counseling in schools. In line to that, values and worldwide view competence for the counselor is important aspect in the counseling profession so as to help clients to accept their situation in consideration to reality.

This is because themes that represent the positive forces of counseling emphasize on wellness, growth, self awareness, justice, strengths, and relationship, interaction between the individual and her context, and acknowledgement of the importance of the cultural frame (Hansen, 2005; 2009). As Ponto and Duban (2009) noted; "In whatever specialty counselors practice, they are asked to provide expertise to the problem of balancing an individual needs, strength, and identity with the group as society within which that individual function. This suggests that the values of the counseling profession are articulated and reinforced through the establishment and affirmation of ethical codes.

### **The Role of School Counselors' Perception on their Counseling Roles in Schools**

Professionally, an effective counselor needs to possess the qualities needed for that work. Many scholars in the field of counseling such as Corey (1996) and McLeod (1998) have identified qualities of a good counselor to be self respect and appreciation of themselves towards their counseling duties and responsibilities they are engaged. Furthermore, it has been argued that the extent to which teachers implement any curriculum is largely dependent upon and influenced by their attitude and perception towards it (Paulussen, Kok & Schaalma, 1994). That is why

several authors have recommended that teachers' perception and attitude towards any program and the confidence in providing the said program should be assessed prior to engaging them in its delivery (Nkalema & Oshi, 2004; Mathews, Boon, Fisher & Schaalma, 2006). On top of that Zanden (1987) emphasize that, perception is the mediating link between individuals and their environment. It is the ability to derive information from the environment, interpret the information, and act upon. Therefore in consideration to the explained facts, school-counselors' perception towards the counseling services they give to students in schools can influence the success or the failure in effective provision of this service in schools.

On the other hand Snyder and Uranowitz as cited in Zanden (1987) emphasize that, "We live our lives not in isolation, but in social world and through this setting an individual selects, organizes, and interprets information to create a meaningful picture of the world. In general perception depends not only on the physical stimuli, but also on the stimuli's relation to the surrounding field and on conditions within the individual". This fact imply that school counselors perception on what is currently happening in schools in line to guidance and counseling activities reflect the level of effectiveness and the nature of the required improvements and issues to address so as to make counseling services effective.

In most African countries for example Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda and Nigeria, secondary education is the springboard into the world of work or into tertiary institutions for further preparation of gainful living the fact which is well known and valued by both students and their parents or guardians. This means that a programmes on guidance and counseling at secondary school level should also embrace educational, vocational and personal or social counseling. The objectives such as helping individual students to understand and appreciate school regulations and rules for healthy and responsible school community are very much important (Biswalo, 1996).

As responses to challenges caused by the inadequate guidance and counseling services in schools the government of Tanzania has tries to institutionalize this service in schools. In the year 1997, the government through the then Ministry of education instructed all heads of schools to make sure that there are school counselors at least to guide students on how to match the school subject studied and the world of work. The instruction emphasized on the need for the selected teacher-counselor to assist students in application for careers and training for students, assisting students with occupational information and their requirements as well as helping students to make long range plans of study (URT, 1997, P.20).

To emphasize on this the then Ministry of Education and Culture noted the increase in the rate of problem behaviors in Tanzania schools which were revealed through breach of school rules, school absenteeism, destruction of school and public property, use of illegal drugs, use of alcohol and engagement in sexual practice, hence stressed the need for introducing guidance and counseling in schools and colleges (URT, 2002).

However, the 76,002 students drop out in secondary schools in the year 2011 for problem behavior related reasons which include , truancy- 55,267 (72.1%), pregnancy-5,157 (6.8%) and misbehavior- 2,879 (3.8%) suggest some weaknesses in guidance and counseling services in schools in Tanzania. In addition to that, 10,532 (13.7%) children dropped out of school in the same year due to parents' failure to meets students' basic needs (BEST, 2011), this reflect lack of follow up for teachers in schools and neglect from the school authority in noting the problems facing students before they decide to quit school environment. In general, presence of large number of school children dropping out of school for reasons related to problem behaviors such as truancy, misbehaviors, and pregnancy as indicator of early engagement in sexual activities suggest a weakness in school offices responsible for guidance and counseling the area which this paper intend to explore.

Reflecting on the provision of school counseling services in Tanzania secondary schools, one among several challenges identified by different studies is inadequate of counseling knowledge and skills among teacher-counselors and difficulty in shifting a role from a teacher to a counselor which is seen as the result of inadequate counseling skills and knowledge for teacher counselors. Study by Nkuba (2010; 2013) on the status of career counseling services in Tanzania schools also indicate serious inadequacy of counseling skills among school counselors. Hence this observation call for the attention on the need to provide knowledge and skills to school counselors through various training programs to school counselors.

### **Statement of the Problem**

School counseling services provision was officially introduced in Tanzania schools so as to overcome the frequent disciplinary incidences, increase in the rate of dropout by pregnancy and to respond to the HIV/AIDS occurrences (URT, 2002). Following this decision few training for teacher-counselors in some schools has been provided so as to make this service effective in schools (Sima, 2010). Regardless of the training, there is

evidence of ineffective provision of counseling services in schools reflected by the serious behavioral problems and ineffective guidance and counseling services in schools (Nkuba, 2012). The problems which are currently facing children in schools are contributing largely into dropout due to truancy, pregnancy among school girls and other misbehaviors such as fighting, theft, destruction of school properties, use of illegal drugs and alcohol (BEST, 2010; 2011). It is due to this fact the current paper seeks to examine the level of training, skills and knowledge held by school counselors in Tanzania secondary schools.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Specifically, the objectives of the study were;

- To examine the extent to which school-counselors have attended trainings in guidance and counseling
- To assess the school-counselors' awareness of principles of guidance and counseling in schools
- To assess school-counselors' perception and their roles in guidance and counseling in schools

## METHODOLOGY

The study employed both quantitative and qualitative research approaches so as to minimize the weaknesses of each. It is emphasized that, quantitative and qualitative approaches to research are complimentary, they should be used together so as to maximize the strength and minimize the limitations of each. The cross sectional survey research design was used, this was considered to suffice the study demands because it allows collection of data from schools with different characteristics (Bryman, 2004). Moreover, Gay, Mills, & Airrasian (2006) emphasizes that, cross sectional survey is good design for collecting information in a relatively short period of time and making predictions. The study was conducted in Dar es Salaam region, Tanzania. The target population for the present study included school counselors in different secondary schools in Tanzania which were purposefully selected in consideration to their duties in schools. School counselors were an interesting subpopulation due to the reasons that they are currently dealing with counseling services provision in school. The sample of the present study was 62 secondary school counselors as indicated in table 1.

Socio-demographic variable	Category	Frequency (%)
Type of school	Public	10 (16.1)
	Private	52 (83.9)
Gender	Females	44 (71)
	Males	18 (29)
Education level	Diploma	26 (41.9)
	Degree	30 (48)
	Postgraduate	6 (9.7)

Data were collected through questionnaires where by major sections or items representing various clusters were computed to frequencies and determination of descriptive statistics were done through statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 15.0 (Pallat, 2005). Moreover, the qualitative information obtained through interviews was descriptively analyzed and major summaries were reported together with some direct quotations from respondents in providing more insight on the answers provided by respondents.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The Extent to which School counselors are Trained in Guidance and Counseling

Table 2: The extent to which school counselors are trained in guidance and counseling

Statements	Agree		Not sure		Disagree	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
I have no any training in guidance and counseling	18	29	0	0	44	71
I did guidance and counseling in my teacher training	11	17.8	2	3.2	49	79
I have a professional training in guidance and counseling	00	00	00	00	62	100
I did guidance and counseling in a seminar/workshop	16	25.8	00	00	46	74.2
I did guidance and counselling as in-service course	24	38.7	00	00	38	61.3

Considering the findings observed in line to training status for school counselors, results indicated that 18 (29%) respondents agreed that they have no any training in guidance and counseling while 44 (71%) respondents acknowledged to have guidance and counseling training of some sort. In attempt to identify the specific types of training they have attended, the results revealed that 11 (17.8%) respondents said to have done counseling as a course in their teacher training, 16 (25.8%) respondents in seminar and workshops and 24 (38.7%) respondents in a specific designed in-service guidance and counselling training course. With a surprise no any respondent agreed to have a professional training in guidance and counselling when this question was asked as indicated in table 2. Apart from the information obtained through questionnaire, respondents provided more insight during interview, this was evident in the following comments;

"I comment to be given support by the school and government on short and long course training so as to be knowledgeable in school guidance and counselling rather than working without any good training" (A school counsellor from one of the private schools recommended).

Another school counsellor from one of the government school made a comment that;

"Training is very important because it can help me with knowledge and principles for guidance and counselling which will help in handling students' psychological, social and academic problems".

The information obtained in this study show the level at which the demand for training of school counsellors is required. Many of the school counsellors seem to have attended some training and there was evidence that in-service training is now the only window to enhance training of school counsellors in school. In line to this observation it is good to strengthen the pre-service training so as to reflect the demand for skilled school counsellors so as to increase the window for more teachers and school psychologists to be trained so as to help students in schools. On the other hand it is now the time to have specific professional training program in counselling so as to have professionals focused in this area centrally to the current situation where by there is no single school counsellor who is working in schools with qualification in counselling.

The observation in this paper is totally opposite to the effort showed by the government of Tanzania by introducing counselling services in schools so as to overcome the existing school challenges facing students (URT, 2002). The findings are also in line to what Biswalo (1996) reported in his work which revealed presence of untrained school educational counsellors performing the roles which of educational guidance and counselling. The current observation indicate the extension of the results revealed in the study by Nkuba (2010) which indicated that counselling services in Tanzania is to some extent not a reality in Tanzania schools. Hence counselors need professional preparations in order

to provide services for changing culturally diverse populations of societies which affects students' school life.

### School counselors' Awareness, Knowledge and Skills of Guidance and Counseling

Table 3: Teachers' Awareness, Knowledge and Skills of guidance and counseling

Statements	Agree		Not sure		Disagree	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Guidance and counseling is a new phenomena for me	21	33.8	2	3.2	39	62.9
I know that guidance and counseling is not a voluntary activity to students in schools rather a must	42	67.8	7	11.3	13	21
Guidance and counseling should go hand in hand with discipline issues to students in schools	49	79	0	00	13	21
Students' problems raised in counseling session should be shared to other teachers so as to help students easily	43	69.4	5	8.1	14	22.6
I know the challenges which courses students to seek for guidance and counselling in schools	48	77.4	4	6.5	10	16.2

\* F=Frequency, % =Percentage

In attempt to test the counseling knowledge and skills which the school counselors hold, the results revealed low level of knowledge, awareness and general counseling skill required by a counselor in provision of counseling services in any environment. The said response was evident in table 3 when school counselors were required to state the importance of confidentiality in the counseling activities. Under this aspect 43 (69.4%) of respondents indicated that they are not aware if confidentiality is important while 14(22.6%) respondents seem to be aware of the need for maintaining confidentiality in counseling services. Another area which was tested in this aspect was in the need for separating counseling services and discipline issues, in their response 49 (79%) respondents commended that discipline cases should be dealt together with counseling services, the comment which disagree with professional counseling principles and guidelines.

Furthermore, respondents were required to comment on whether professional counseling in schools should be treated as a voluntary service or not. Their comments and understanding in this part indicate that counseling activities in schools is not voluntary activity at the frequency of 42 (67.8%) which reveal the inadequate awareness among the school counselors in schools. On the other hand the study was interested to understand if the school counselors understand the reason for students seeking guidance and counseling in schools. In this aspect their response indicate 48 (77.4%) of them are aware of different challenges facing students and the reasons for seeking counseling services. During interviews some teachers raised some observation which indicated the need for more skills and techniques in school counseling so as to help them in their duties as noted here;

"I am not comfortable with students' counseling because I always use my experience in teaching which sometimes doesn't work. It is better to attend intensive seminars and training in order to know the rules and skills in guidance and counseling".

In line to that another school counselors made a comment that;

"I am not comfortable in doing students' guidance and counseling because as a counselor I have to know the rules and regulations which guide the counseling process".

The response under this category reveals that, school counselors in many schools in Tanzania needs effective training so as to provide knowledge, awareness and skills for successful counseling provision in schools in the

country. Apart from that observed weaknesses in the provision of counseling services provision in schools can results to suffering for students in schools the condition which can results to school dropout for many students as indicated in BEST (2010; 2011). In fact, the findings in this study go hand in hand with observations made by several other studies such as Sima (2010), Nkuba (2010) and Biswalo (1996) on the inadequacy of counseling knowledge, awareness and skills for school counselors in Tanzania.

### Teachers' Perception and Evaluation of Guidance and Counseling Provision in Schools

Table 4: Teachers' perception on guidance and counseling provision in schools

Statements	Agree		Not sure		Disagree	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
I believe that guidance and counselling can be done with an experienced teacher even without training	20	32.2	5	8.1	37	59.1
I believe that guidance and counseling need to be done by a trained teacher-counselor	43	85.5	5	8.1	4	6.5
I believe that challenges which are facing students in schools does not necessarily need a trained counselor	5	8.1	4	6.5	53	85.5
I think guidance and counseling training is not so much important for me as a teacher	2	3.2	2	3.2	58	93.5
I feel that, I am able to do guidance and counseling even without any training in guidance and counseling	41	66	5	8.1	16	25.8
I believe that this is the right time to train teachers to serve as counsellors in schools	60	96.8	00	00	2	3.2

\* F=Frequency, % =Percentage

In an attempt to assess the school counselors' perception and evaluation on the provision of counseling services in schools the responses revealed good attention on the need for training school counselors in schools. When asked on the need for training school counselors 60 (96.8%) respondent agreed that this is the right time to train school counselors in schools. In line to that 43 (85.5%) respondents acknowledged that school counseling activities in schools should be done by trained counselors and not any teacher to be appointed by the head of schools or students. Furthermore, respondents also acknowledged that counseling training is important to teachers in schools so as they can serve as school counselors, this was evident when 58 (93.8%) of respondents indicated disagreement with the statement which proposed that counseling courses are not important to school counselors. On the other hand 44(66%) of respondents commended that they are able to do counseling to students in schools even without further training, this may be influenced by their current engagement in counseling activities which exposed them to the task without any serious training.

During the interview session with school counselors, several comments were pointed out in line to what they believe and perceive in the school counseling provisions, some of these comments were such;

"I am not comfortable in this task of students counseling and I perceive myself as irrelevant person in this assignment. This is because counseling should be provided by any individual after attending specified training or a course in this field" (A teacher counselor from one of the government schools visited commented).

Comment from another teacher counselor from one of the private school visited revealed the readiness for these school counselors to engage in school counseling though challenged with inadequate training on their side as noted;

"Yes, I am comfortable with this duty though there are some difficulties facing students which I also fail to resolve. I think training is very important because it can help us with skills for handling students' cases and challenges"

The observed comments suggest that school counselors are aware with the need for training in counseling so as to improve their counseling knowledge and skills so as to provide psychological guidance and support in schools. This implies that if a good training is introduced school counselors will actively participate in the training and obtain knowledge and skills required for students' counseling in schools.

The findings in this aspect go hand in hand with the recommendation made by Corey (1996) and McLeod (1998) who pointed out that a good counselor should be open for learning, respecting themselves and others and considering positively their counseling duties and responsibilities which they are engaged. This demand is evident in this study because school counselors in schools indicate high degree of readiness for engaging in training for school counseling and then provision of this service to students in schools.

### **The extent of readiness for teachers to attend a training in guidance and counseling**

Table 5: The extent to which school counselors are ready to attend a training

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean		Std. Deviation
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic
Rt	62	1	4	1.39	.070	.554
Valid N (list wise)						

In an attempt to assess the school counselors' readiness to attend training courses in counseling if this opportunity is provided, all 62 (100%) respondents agreed.

In calculating the degree of their agreement the mean was determined in a scale with assigned numbers ranging from highly (1), interested (2), not sure (3) and not interested (4). In determining the response, respondents shown good agreement ( $M= 1.39$ ,  $SD=0.554$ ) which is the positive state according to the scale used. In line to that an interview was done with respondents on the need for training, In this interview one of the respondents made a comment that;

"We are performing this duty without any serious training in guidance and counseling. Though we know the challenges facing students, it sometimes become very difficult to help them due to complications in their cases" (A teacher counselor from one of the private school said).

Another teacher counselor from one of the government schools included in the study made a comment that; "I am not comfortable in doing school counseling without any training, this is because many students' problems need specific skills to deal with them which we currently fail to solve them due to lack of these skills".

This narration tells that, respondents appreciate the difficulties in cases reported by students, this might be influenced by the inadequate skills they possess in school counseling. In such circumstances it is evident that if any program is introduced in our institutions for the purpose of providing counseling education to the current group of school counselors there is a possibility of attracting them to the training. This can help them to be in position of helping school learners in their social, academic and psychological concerns as emphasized in the government notice numbers 11 of the year 2002 provided through the Ministry of education and vocational training (URT, 2002).

The readiness for training to school counselors exposed in this study is more likely to ensure that counseling professionals in schools help them to gain knowledge of human development, behavioral, group dynamics, relationship, culture, health and wellness as emphasized by CACREP (2009).

### **Conclusions**

This paper has established new understanding on the need for providing intensive training for school counselors in secondary schools in Dar es salaam and Tanzania in general. From the findings it can be concluded that, students' in many schools in Dar es salaam and Tanzania in general are at risks which can be the results of different circumstances ranging from social, psychology, economic and academic. The risk can be attributed to the current lack of effective trained school counselors in schools. Therefore, these findings are unique to Dar es

Salaam, Tanzania and call for government, education stakeholders and schools to improve school counseling services by training the appointed school counselors.

### **Recommendations**

Government and educational institutions should work together so as to train school counselors in either short or long courses. Furthermore government through ministry of education and vocational training should establish a properly coordinated school counseling unit in the ministry which will focus in making counseling services effective in Tanzania schools. The findings of this study might have largely reflected school counseling services in Dar es salaam, since this study was based on cross sectional survey. Therefore, a longitudinal study ranging from primary schools to colleges would be essential so as to show in detail the causes and effects of inadequate counseling services in education institutions in the country.

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